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CHANGING THE PECKING ORDER.
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THE CURRENT INFLEXIBILITY OF BUSINESS AND COLLEGES IN WANTING TO USE ONLY "CREDENTIALED" PEOPLE (I.E. THOSE WITH A HIGH SCHOOL DIPLOMA OR COLLEGE DEGREE) IS ACTING AS A BARRIER TO QUALIFIED INDIVIDUALS WHO WERE UNABLE TO COMPLETE THEIR EDUCATION. TO COMBAT THIS, IT IS NECESSARY THAT (1) EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS BOTH CONTINUE AND AUGMENT SUCH PROGRAMS AS UPWARD BOUND AND TALENT SEARCH, (2) COLLEGES LEARN TO RECOGNIZE TALENT AND ABILITY IN A DEPRIVED PERSON EVEN THOUGH HIS ACADEMIC RECORD MAY NOT REFLECT IT, (3) COLLEGES USE ENTRANCE EXAMINATION SCORES AS DIAGNOSTIC DEVICES TO INCLUDE, RATHER THAN EXCLUDE, THE DEPRIVED--E.G. IF AN APPLICANT'S SCORES SHOW HIM TO BE DEFICIENT IN A SUBJECT, HE SHOULD BE ADMITTED, AND PLACED IN A COMPENSATORY COURSE RATHER THAN BEING REJECTED, (4) BUSINESS RELATE THE SUBPROFESSIONAL ROLE TO THE PROFESSIONAL ROLE SO THAT SHIFTING FROM ONE TO THE OTHER IS EASIER, AND (5) BOTH COLLEGES AND BUSINESS GIVE CREDIT FOR EXPERIENCE, EVEN IF CREDENTIALS ARE NOT PRESENT. OVER-RIGID, CONFLICTING, STATE-BY-STATE TEACHER CERTIFICATION REQUIREMENTS ALSO NEED TO BE OVERHAULED, RELAXED AND STANDARDIZED IN ORDER TO MAKE AVAILABLE THE ABUNDANCE OF QUALIFIED BUT UNCREDENTIALED TALENT ENTRANCE EXAMINATION BOARD (CHICIAGO, OCT. 24, 1967). (AW) AVAILABLE TO TEACHING. PAPER PRESENTED BEFORE COLLEGE ENTRANCE EXAMINATION BOARD (CHICAGO, ILL., OCT. 24, 1967). (AW)

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CHANGING THE PECKING ORDER*

An Address by Harold Howe II
U.S. Commissioner of Education
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It is very pleasant for me to realize that this evening I have the members of the College Entrance Examination Board temporarily at my mercy. I know that this heady monopoly won't last long, but as a former vice-chairman and a long time committee member I hope you will forgive me for enjoying the opportunity to speak to you at some length, on a subject of my own choosing, without fear of interruption.

I do this, of course, by virtue of my present office. Though I am no more learned and not any wiser than I was as a member of this group, being Commissioner of Education does give me a certain leverage I didn't have before.

It is this leverage--or, more precisely, such criteria for leverage--that I mean to criticize this evening.

The barnyard hierarchy which chickens establish among themselves is a natural phenomenon that we all take for granted. We call it "the pecking order." It brings the larger, the stronger, or the more confident chickens to the feeding trough before the skinny, introverted ones, who most need to be fed. But in the hierarchy of social and occupational dominance, prestige and authority based on academic or titular credentials are human phenomena that I am afraid we cannot afford to take for granted.

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*Before the College Entrance Examination Board, Chicago, Illinois, Tuesday, October 24, 1967, at 8 p.m.

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
OFFICE OF EDUCATION

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It is our somewhat artificial human pecking order that requires some examination.

It seems to me extremely important to the survival and the health of America that we find ways for the institutions which control opportunity in our society to do so with a concern for those people who have been denied opportunity by the shortcomings of the society.

It is of desperate importance in a viable and open social system that we learn to cherish and nurture a variety of talents with adequate appreciation for each. Secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare John Gardner pinpointed this neatly for us when he wrote:

> "An excellent plumber is infinitely more admirable than an incompetent philosopher. The society which scorns excellence in plumbing because plumbing is a humble activity and tolerates shoddiness in philosophy because it is an exalted activity will have neither good plumbing nor good philosophy. Neither its pipes nor its theories will hold water."

I'd like to go a step further and suggest that it is not inconceivable that our excellent plumber might also have the makings of an admirable philosopher. We have no accurate way of knowing that he would not. If we think he would not (and we probably do), it is most likely because he has no degree in philosophy.

Which may be a bit like saying that Socrates wasn't a good teacher because he had no teaching credential--and suggests that we have forgotten that Spinoza earned his living as a lens grinder and that Tom Edison quit school at the age of nine.

My point is that an academic degree or a diploma is a fairly good indicator of ability--but only in a negative sense; in the sense that a person who has such a degree or diploma is probably not intellectually inadequate.

But taking the symbol for the substance is not the hallmark of good and careful judgment or of attention to individual differences. We should never automatically assume that the person with some letters after his name will perform better than the person without those letters. We should never automatically assume that the person who has held a job precisely like one we are trying to fill will perform better than the person who has no comparable experience.

Unfortunately, people are individuals, and institutions deal in multitudes. There is never time to inspect each person, to grade him like a cut of beef, and stamp him prime, choice, or good. Administrative necessity dictates the establishment of some criteria on which to base selection.

There is considerable evidence that public policy and institutional practice make it extremely difficult for competent but uncredentialled persons to have a fair crack at competitive situations, whether they be social, vocational, or educational.

Without question we need broad minimum standards in a whole basketful of categories. And we need efficient ways to determine whether or not our applicants meet those standards. But efficiency cannot be our only criterion. No matter what system we use to evaluate people, we need to

build in provisions for unique individuals and reasonable allowance for not-so-unique individuals who have some special attribute.

I don't think we are terribly good at this.

At almost every level, in almost all fields, we find an automatic emphasis on credentials, a routine rigidity, whether the credential under consideration is a high school diploma, a Ph.D. or a certificate from a beauty college.

Before I cast any further stones (and I intend to do so), I'd like to make it clear that the Federal government is hardly blameless in this area. This administration, under strong directive from President Johnson, has largely eliminated job discrimination against women and against minority groups. But other categories of discrimination still exist.

Let me quote from a study of equal employment opportunities within my shop, the Office of Education:

> "Overall, racial discrimination is not an important problem in the Office, certainly much less prevalent than in other institutions of society, but substantial attention could be given to...the credential of a college degree which is evidently more important for advancement in OE than competence itself."

Elsewhere the report is more specific: "The chance of a non-college person being promoted across the grade nine-ten barrier (this refers to Civil Service Categories nine and ten) is negligible, while the possibility of a college person being promoted across the barrier in a

reasonable number of years (say three) is very high. OE policy appears to say that virtually no one without a college degree is capable of handling work above Civil Service grade nine."

The most heartening element of this report is the absence of racial discrimination per se within the Office--but I'm not sure our overdependence on sheepskin and degrees is not, in its own way, an inadvertent racial discrimination.

Professor S. M. Miller of New York University made this point last year in a paper called "Credentialism and the Education System." Pointing out that education once served as a means of ascendancy for the poor, he said it is now "becoming a bar to the new poor's effort to change conditions. Today the insistence on education as a prerequisite for jobs is becoming a barrier to the occupational ascendancy of today's disprivileged.

"We have become a credential society, where one's educational level is more important than what he can do. People cannot obtain jobs that they could well fill because they lack educational qualifications. Negroes who dropped out of the educational steeplechase before getting a high school diploma cannot get jobs. Employers and the better-off do not feel that there is discrimination; rather the low-educated are 'not qualified.'"

This credentialling myopia is by no means confined to the disadvantaged. In almost every occupation, at almost every level, one finds certification requirements of one kind or another locking people out of

situations in which they might well be substantial contributors. This remains true, though we know that new technology changes job functions so fast that adaptability may be more essential in a prospective employee than any specific knowledge or specific training.

Classified ad columns are full of jobs for deliverymen, parking attendants, elevator operators, etc.--who need not have experience as long as they have high school diplomas. Though a high school education may not contribute much to the skill of an elevator operator, it does simplify the task of a personnel manager who knows that his applicants are likely to be conformists, if nothing more.

The official directory of the City of New York has 47 pages of very small type that list licenses, permits, or certification requirements for such diverse occupations as midwifery, ophthalmic dispensary traineeships, undertakers, oil-burner operators, and funeral directors' apprentices.

A recent letter to members of a private university club in New York City announced the appointment of a man whom I shall fictitiously call Charles Chan as general manager. It identified him as Charles Chan, CCM. What is CCM? Certified Club Manager.

I don't mean to suggest that I am against letters after peoples' names, nor am I against any sort of effort to insure competence or adequate skills on the part of midwives or undertakers.

What does concern me is that the route into an increasing number of occupations is a specific educational route and, for some professions, that route begins close to infancy and makes no provision for detours.

Author John Keats has written of the ferocious competition for entrance to private nursery schools. In New York City, such preschools report over 150 applications for every vacancy. This kind of competition stems from parental concern for their children's entrance into elementary and preparatory school (which is easier for a graduate of a "good" nursery school), and aims ultimately, of course, at entrance into a "good" college. Anxious parents have been known to hire tutors to coach three-year-olds on the Stanford Binet test and to change their religious affiliation to secure placement in desirable church-sponsored schools.

Again, I'm not against private nursery schools nor against parents who want the best education for their children. My concern is that this credential-laden rat race doesn't permit society to establish meaningful criteria and standards that apply to the population as a whole. Nor does it allow adequately for exceptions.

A society that prides itself on equality of opportunity must somehow learn to accommodate those children who are least likely to collect adequate credentials but who may have the unrealized potential to succeed in demanding tasks.

There are many bright children in inner-city schools. I think that there is a reasonable doubt that they get a fair shake. It may well be, as Marshall McLuhan has said, that it is the bright kids who drop out because school "is not where the action is." Certainly bright people drop out of college and graduate schools. But typically our schools and colleges have acted as selection agents on an economic basis (and therefore on a racial basis) rather than as purveyors of equal opportunity.

In the last few years we have established a new doctrine for elementary and secondary education; its premise is that equal educational opportunity does not result from treating all pupils equally.

The underlying basis for the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 is the conviction that our schools must do more for those pupils who come to school with less--and this includes, but is not limited to, spending more per pupil for their education.

Now it is time to ask what the colleges have done (and what they propose to do) in order to reflect this new philosophy in higher education; how they plan to give students the educational opportunities that will help them progress, and when they will forego their role as sorting out institutions serving the "haves" and ignoring the "have-nots."

We have to remember that the high school student who sticks it out because he knows he can earn almost twice as much as his dropout friend (even if his friend is brighter) isn't <u>always</u> more valuable to society than the dropout. The student who stays in college knowing that he will probably earn $150,000 more than his friend who drops out is not <u>necessarily</u> an inquiring intellect. The graduate student writing his thesis on the Subliminal Use of Visual Symbols in 14th and 15th Century Prose and Poetry may not be on an educational quest of much significance even though it will gain him a credential. He may be, as suggested by Kingsley Amis, engaging in the Teutonic academic tradition of "casting pseudo-light on non-problems."

The promising law student who elects a law school that confers a Doctor of Jurisprudence instead of Harvard, which confers a Bachelor of

Laws, is probably a realist. He knows that the JD can make him an instant assistant professor if he chooses to teach after graduation. With an LLB, even from Harvard, he will probably only be offered an instructorship, although the course work and skills required for the LLB may be more demanding.

Until we learn how to tell when people are competent, we will continue to have a great many people going to school for the wrong reasons and a great many more who are not going to school for the wrong reasons. As managers and as admissions officers we are going to lose a lot of "mute, inglorious Miltons" unless we find some better ways to measure potential ability and unless we can serve larger numbers of people with an education which helps the individual reach the credential rather than failing him because he cannot reach it in the same fashion as others.

I don't know what the answer is; perhaps if we could confer PhD's along with citizenship and a social security number at birth, our schools would change from credentialling agencies to incubators of culture and centers of intellectual ferment. Barring such a development, we need, at the very least, to find new ways to credential people who missed their footing on some step of the social, economic, and educational escalator.

There is a paradox here: we've committed ourselves to the credentialling system, and now we need to find ways to beat it. The institutions which are involved in it must now learn to act on behalf of the people who are affected by it. Some institutions are already beginning

to take an interest in high risk students, and the Federal government is helping support their efforts through Upward Bound, Talent Search, and a number of other compensatory programs.

But institutional efforts must go beyond taking these less credentialled youngsters into their hallowed halls; the institutions will have to offer them special support services after they get there--we can't just get rid of them if they start to fail. If their intellectual foundations are weak, then we will have to do a rebuilding job.

This is going to demand some major adjustments on the part of institutions--not a lowering of standards but the introduction of flexibility. If a student comes from a deprived background, the college has to read that into his record and learn to identify his talent and ability even though his test scores do not show it in conventional ways.

This also means that we have to read the disadvantaged background factor into college entrance examination scores before making decisions on admission. If we consider tests as diagnostic devices, they can be used to include, rather than exclude. Thus a youngster who is far behind in math may be admitted, but required to take a special compensatory math course. Perhaps colleges should add a whole year of pre-college compensatory work to the regular curriculum offerings. We're all living longer nowadays. There is no reason that some of us can't take five years to get through college. If the added time will bring success, it's more than worth it.

Our country has a tremendous investment in this sort of rebuilding. We simply can't let a whole generation go by because we've just learned the lessons of Head Start and are waiting for last year's pre-schoolers to reach college age. We must get some of these people into colleges now so that we can graduate more Mexican-Americans and more Negroes now. Otherwise we are going to end up with a rigidly stratified society because the whole credentialling system serves the middle class and rejects the less fortunate.

All our carefully developed forms of exclusion might make economic (if not moral) sense if society was oversupplied with skilled manpower. At a time when we face desperate shortages in almost all professions and skilled trades, it is wasteful and dangerous.

Let's take teaching for an example. Accumulated data from elementary and secondary school districts across the Nation show a shortage of over 200,000 certified teachers. What does that mean? What does it take to be a certified teacher? If we move from locality to locality, from coast to coast, we find a conflicting array of certification requirements. Do they make sense? Often they do. But let's examine an individual instance:

A woman in her late twenties, a graduate of Smith College, had taught English successfully in a French school in Paris for two years, had been an editorial assistant on Réalités for one year and had taught French in a private preparatory school in Pennsylvania for two years. She moved to another State and applied for a job teaching French in a suburban, public elementary school.

I don't need to tell you what happened. No job, because of lack of credentials. I probably don't need to tell you, either, that a majority of States do not require language teachers to be able to speak the language they are to teach; an unfortunately large number of language teachers cannot do so.

I am sure there is an abundance of qualified but uncredentialled (note that I resist saying the reverse--credentialled but unqualified) talent available to the elementary and secondary school classrooms of this Nation. But the benefits of this talent will continue to elude us as long as we are locked into a rigid credentialling system that permits us, out of fear, laziness or irresponsibility, to abandon the exercise of judgment when we make decisions about people.

I might add that there are signs of a break-through on the credential problem. Although I know some Congressmen who would not consider it a virtue, both President Kennedy and President Johnson have set an example by appointing Commissioners of Education who lacked an advanced degree. On the other side of the coin is the fact that neither of these Commissioners can meet the new credentials of the American Association of School Administrators.

Those who are already established in a profession or occupation are usually responsible for maintaining its standards. When a credentialling review committee is established, somehow its members always come up with tougher entrance requirements. Rarely does anyone ever suggest making it easier to get in and the possibility of getting some good people that way.

It is human nature to want to keep our club hard to get into; logic always loses when the ego is threatened. Even public relations, the last refuge for eclectic self-educated talent (after metropolitan newspapers began requiring journalism degrees for copyboys) recently instituted tough credentialling procedures--so tough that only 17 percent of the present members of the national society were able to pass the examination. Nonetheless, new applicants will have to do so or the national society won't accept them.

These are not frivolous matters. When we determine the educational and vocational limits of individual lives by such practices, procedures and symbols, we not only do injustice to the individual but we inflict a potential talent loss of inestimable consequence to the Nation.

What can we do about it? We certainly cannot do away with credentials--they are as much a part of the contemporary scene as taxes and television (and I have mixed feelings about all three).

But we can minimize their impact of a negative kind by having the wisdom to use them wisely and flexibly. We can, as I said earlier, develop some new ways to acquire them. Several Federal programs focus on this problem. They are aimed at developing new careers for the poor, jobs that provide semi-professional status in the fields of medicine and education. We <u>can</u> do this; we can break down the professional role so that subprofessional jobs open up. More importantly we can relate the subprofessional role to the professional so that a person can shift from one to the other with greater ease. There are plenty of teacher

aides and nurses aides who would make good teachers or good nurses if we could provide special training programs for them and persuade the professional establishment to accept their ability to perform professional tasks despite the absence of some of the traditionally required credentials.

We can give more credit for experience, both in hiring people and in selecting them for educational institutions. An example: When the State University of New York opens its experimental college next year, it plans to give undergraduate credit for Peace Corps experience.

Colleges and universities might relax entrance requirements for masters degree candidates. Gifted college dropouts with ten or fifteen years subsequent experience who wish to enter a masters degree program should, perhaps, be able to get a waiver of their undergraduate degree.

We must remember that some people will learn whether or not they have the advantage of college experience; that some other people, if they have staying power, can end up with degrees that really don't mean much.

We can continue to search for better ways to evaluate people, more sophisticated ways to measure ability, skill, and potential. And finally, we can build escape clauses into all our certifying, credentialling and admissions procedures to allow individual consideration of people with special situations, unique talents, or measurable handicaps.

None of this is enough to change radically the pecking order, but if we are conscientious in our effort to look at people, not paper, and offer honest second chances educationally and professionally, we may be able to help a few skinny chickens get a little closer to the feeding trough.

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